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19 November 1955

PROJECT AQUATONE

1. On the 23rd of November, 1954, the members of the Intelligence Advisory Committee signed a memorandum in which they referred to the "serious gaps in our intelligence covering the Soviet Bloc" and said, "We believe that we could have a substantially improved capability of filling these gaps through the use of aerial reconnaissance and photography and that today these methods are the most practicable means to this end." On 1 December Project AQUATONE was approved and set in motion.

2. On the basis of purely oral assurance, the Lockheed Company started to work on a reconnaissance aircraft designed throughout to achieve maximum altitude and range. In the same way and with the same urgency, one of the best optical specialists in the country, working with two other companies, started the development of lenses and cameras to achieve results far surpassing those attainable with any then existing designs. These companies were given letter contracts and later final contracts as rapidly as they could be worked out. By mid-February the development and manufacture of specialized equipment was under way in six companies as follows:

High altitude long-range aircraft -- Lockheed Aircraft Company

An improved model of the J-57 jet engine -- Pratt & Whitney

Optics and cameras -- Perkin-Elmer Company and Hycon Manufacturing Company

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[redacted] 25X1D

Modified high altitude aircraft fuel -- Shell Oil Company (through General Doolittle)

As the program progressed, development has had to be undertaken in three other fields. First, the Eastman Company has developed improved and specialized film and processing techniques for this project. Second, the [redacted] 25X1D

Third, a number of companies, including Baird Associates, Ramo-Wooldridge, and Eastman, have joined in an attack on the problem of navigation over hostile territory.

3. In order to save time, we have ordered from all of these companies the number of items that we would need to mount a major reconnaissance effort without waiting for prototypes to be developed. Our target has been to have a complete weapons system by the end of this calendar year. In May we determined to build a secret base where equipment could be tested and personnel trained in its use [redacted] 25X1A

25X1A [redacted] The base was ready for use in mid-July, six weeks after it was started. The first aircraft was completed on schedule in late July and made its first flight at the test base on the 5th of August. The first camera configuration was flown at the end of September. [redacted] 25X1D

25X1D [redacted] By mid-December four aircraft will be checked out and in operation with sets of two different kinds of camera configura-

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4. [redacted] 25X1D

25X1D [redacted] The cameras have worked well at high altitude and with photography of higher quality than ever previously available. Technical problems have of course been encountered but most of them have been solved in a satisfactory manner. Much the most serious has been that of developing a satisfactory fuel control which would ensure reliable operation of jet engines at these unique altitudes. This problem appears to be on its way to solution.

5. Last June we discussed at some length with the Air Force the organization of this Project during its operational phase. Our conversations resulted some weeks later in an agreement by the terms of which the Project is being conducted by a joint task force which, although it includes Air Force officers and other personnel in all the positions where their experience and technical skill is called for, remains nevertheless essentially civilian in character. Our main reason for organizing these sensitive activities in this manner is to permit them to be conducted with a maximum of security as clandestine intelligence gathering operations and to minimize any connection with the regular military services of the United States and, more especially, with SAC, which is this country's offensive air arm. In short, our purpose has been to create circumstances such that if ever this activity becomes known to the enemy, it will be possible to assert truthfully that it is an intelligence gathering activity of the clandestine services. Up to this time, at least, this

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basic concept, and our agreement with the Air Force, has proved to be workable and our relations with all elements of the Air Force could not have been more amicable nor more satisfactory.

6. Under the arrangement we have established, SAC has the primary responsibility for training the units that will conduct operations overseas and for providing them with necessary support. The line of command of these units, however, will be run from a Project Headquarters here in Washington which is technically a part of CIA but is under the joint control of Secretary Quarles and General Twining on the one hand and of General Cabell and myself on the other. 25X1C 25X1C

[redacted]

7. [redacted] we hope to be ready to start operations on or about 1 April 1956. We have selected Adana, Turkey, as the base that would best suit our purposes and by that date we believe we can have four aircraft in position and together with the pilots to fly them and the personnel to maintain and operate them. As more aircraft are delivered and more pilots are trained, we would deploy another such unit 25X1A

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to the Far East, [redacted] and eventually a third, perhaps to another location in Europe.

8. I believe it is fair to say that our progress to date on this Project has been extraordinary. Almost all the new technical development that has been undertaken will have widespread application. If in the next several months we develop real reliability in all elements of the system, we should be able to carry out our mission with only a negligible chance of interception by the enemy and, we hope, subject to only occasional, fleeting detection. This activity will of course involve political risks but we are doing everything that can be done to reduce them to a minimum. The benefits we hope to obtain should be enormous.

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